

Peggy Welch

State Representative • District 60

Summer 2000

Though summer is in full swing, the status of Indiana's educational system is never far from the minds of parents, educators, business people, and legislators. Therefore, I would like to review with you what has been done in the past two years to make a difference in our children's education.

In 1999, the General Assembly formalized a group that had started meeting the year before. The purpose of the group, which became known as the Education Roundtable, is to make education recommendations to the Governor, Superintendent of Public Education, the General Assembly, and Indiana State Board of Education. The Roundtable is comprised of persons who represent business/community and education interests. Monroe County businessman, Steven Ferguson, is a charter member of the Roundtable. These members give their own input on issues, but also solicit the recommendations of nationally recognized experts. As a parent, grandparent, or community member, you, too, are an expert and your input is important. You can get information on the Education Roundtable via the Web at <http://www.che.state.in.us/roundtable> or write to Cheryl Orr at 101 W. Ohio St., Ste. 550, Indianapolis, IN 46204-1971.



Rep. Welch (right) talking with Education Roundtable member Steve Ferguson.

Highlighted in this postcard are programs which raise our state's expectations for accountability, academic standards, and school safety. The programs came about due to collaborative development and strong bipartisan support, including the State Chamber of Commerce and the Indiana State Teachers Association.

In the two year state budget, public schools received an average funding increase of 4.7 percent, with a minimum funding increase of 2.5 percent. Schools were also appropriated an additional \$45 million in 2000 to cover shortfalls in the Average Daily Membership (ADM) formula. Funds were included for at-risk and academic honors programs, and local schools and libraries received \$76 million for technology programs and updates. To better reflect the needs of the job market, the vocational education funding formula was reviewed for possible changes. And Indiana's institutions of higher learning had their budgets increased by 7 percent in 2000 and 4.7 percent in 2001.

Have we done all that needs to be done? No! We must increase the value and emphasis we place on education and continue to expect nothing less than excellence from our students, parents, teachers, and schools.

I want to hear what you think about these highlighted programs and what additional steps should be taken to provide the best for our children. You may call me at 812/323-7978 or e-mail me at: H60@ai.org.

Academic Standards Established

For the first time, academic standards for language arts and mathematics are required for EACH grade level, K-12. Previously, we had standards for grades 3, 6, 8, and 10 and proficiencies for other grade levels. We will now have a comprehensive system of K-12 standards. These standards, as outlined in PL 146-1999, are required to be comparable to national and international standards. The Education Roundtable has recently adopted standards for language arts and will soon be adopting standards for math. The new language arts standards have already been judged to be some of the best in the nation, and it is anticipated that the same will be said about the new math standards.

Just recently, the State Board of Education, upon recommendation from the Education Roundtable, has given its approval to shorten the ISTEP by focusing the test on items related to Indiana's academic standards. Also, science and social studies will be added to the ISTEP to ensure our students' compliance with these new standards.

Safe Schools

The fear of violence can be a major obstacle to learning. Our schools should not and cannot become prison-like facilities, but we must take steps to protect our children.

Hoosier schools received almost \$9 million in state money for safe school programs. Indiana's Safe Haven initiatives provide funding to keep schools open for extended hours for programs to help reduce substance abuse and violent behavior and promote educational progress. Schools open before and after the regular school day provide a safe place for children who otherwise would be home alone.

The program also provides funding for emergency preparedness and school safety programs due to the increased potential for violence and disruptive behavior in schools.

It is important for schools to have the training to be able to identify and correct problems before trouble occurs. Funds were provided in the state budget for the training of school safety specialists.

One of the key components of the Indiana safe school initiative is the coordination of safe school programs throughout each county. The state budget provides money to each school corporation for participation in a county school safety commission.

Public concern about school safety played a role in the passage of legislation that allows school security plans to remain confidential. School boards may meet in private to discuss the assessment, design, and implementation of school safety and security measures.

Measures have been taken to protect our children, and that is why Indiana is recognized nationally for its leadership in safe schools policy and planning.

School Accountability

PL 221-1999 provided for the establishment of a standard of continuous improvement for ALL schools. Each school is required to have a committee of parents, business people, and educators. This committee will create an improvement plan, which must be made available to the public. This improvement plan must include professional development for teachers and staff.

This program for school accountability also includes rewards and sanctions. Schools that demonstrate significant progress are given awards; schools that do not make progress are provided assistance and oversight. This program will be implemented in the 2001-2002 school year.

Graduation Exam

The purpose of the ISTEP Gateway Examination is to ensure that students who graduate from Indiana schools can read, write, and compute math and are prepared for postsecondary education. The test is first taken during the sophomore year to allow time for remediation and additional opportunities to pass the exam.

If a student is unable to pass the exam, the student may still graduate if certain requirements are met. If a disabled student has trouble passing the exam, the student's case conference committee determines the student's eligibility for graduation. The waiver process is controlled by the local school corporation.

Eighty-six percent of Indiana's Class of 2000 passed the Gateway Exam. The graduation rate in 1999 was 88%. It is anticipated that the graduation rate for 2000, after waivers are included, will be the same or higher.



Rep. Peggy Welch

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